

PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH NETWORKS SUMMARIES

The Colorado Public Health Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN) will foster research on public health organization, decision-making and practice within the diverse rural and urban settings of Colorado. The network will be organized by the Public Health Alliance of Colorado, a collaborative of ten public health professional associations within the state. Participating practice agencies will include local health departments represented by the Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials, along with the state health agency. Research partners will include faculty from the University of Colorado School of Public Health and School of Medicine, along with the Rocky Mountain Prevention Research Center. The network will focus initially on studying the implementation and impact of a natural experiment involving recently passed state legislation that modernizes state public health laws and redistributes local public health agency responsibilities and powers. Other research interests involve the use of local health and environmental data for public health planning and decision-making.

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The Kentucky Public Health Research Network (K-PHReN) will stimulate and support new research focusing on public health partnerships, strategies to reduce health disparities, and the roles of leadership in public health practice improvement. Administered by the Kentucky Public Health Association, the network will include the Kentucky Department of Health, 17 local public health jurisdictions and their community partners, a state primary care research network, the Kentucky Health Department Association, and research partners at the University of Kentucky College of Public Health. An initial research project will provide a comparative analysis of public health system performance among local public health jurisdictions in Kentucky contrasted with their counterparts in other states. Future project interests include the implementation and impact of partnerships between public health and primary care providers in Kentucky, collaborative practices to reduce health disparities, and the impact of leadership development initiatives on public health practice.

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The Massachusetts Public Health Practice-based Research Network (PBRN) will develop initial research capacity for studying the effects of regionalization on public health service delivery and outcomes. This network will be organized by the practice arm of the Boston University School of Public Health and will take advantage of a

natural experiment created by the state's effort to develop a regionalized organizational structure from its current 351 separate public health jurisdictions. Network participants will include the state Department of Public Health, eight local health departments (LHDs) participating in a state regionalization work group, and representatives from key public health associations within the state. Research partners will include faculty at the Boston University School of Public Health and the nonprofit Institute for Community Health. Initial research projects will elucidate key factors that influence the implementation and impact of regionalized public health delivery models, and will compare the costs and consequences alternative approaches to regionalization.

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The North Carolina Public Health Practice-based Research Network (PBRN) is designed to stimulate and support new research based on the work of nine local health departments of the Central North Carolina Partnership for Public Health, part of a state “incubator” initiative that fosters regional collaboration and innovation in public health practice. The network will allow these agencies and their research partners to formally study the implementation and impact of practice innovations designed through the incubator initiative. The network will be administered through the North Carolina Institute for Public Health at the UNC School of Public Health, and will include collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Public Health and with research partners at the UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. Utilizing a baseline operational model and decision-making protocol developed by several of the local health department partners, the network will pursue an initial research focus on public health infrastructure improvement via workforce development. Examples of specific research projects being considered are: (1) testing strategies for enhancing recruitment and retention of a diverse and well-trained public health workforce; (2) determining optimal staffing ratios for effective delivery of essential public health services; (3) investigating how differences in infrastructure across rural and urban areas affect provision of essential public health services; and (4) exploring how public health workforce diversity and competence impact service utilization at local health departments.

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The Washington Public Health Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN) is designed to support research that examines variations in public health practice across local areas and opportunities for practice improvement through studies of comparative effectiveness. Led by the Public Health-Seattle & King County local health department, the research network will include the local health departments serving the nine largest jurisdictions within the state, along with the Washington State Department of Health, the Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials, and research partners at University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine and School of Nursing. The network will focus on cross-jurisdictional public health practice issues relevant to front-line public health service delivery. An initial research project will compare local health departments' approaches to communicable disease reporting. Long-term research interests include projects that focus on public health financing, quality improvement processes, health disparities, workforce competency, and community health assessment.

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